

Faith Formation 3/8/26

Present: Lindsay Harren-Lewis, Nancy Gillombardo, Gordon Landefeld, Oona Moorhead, Lisa Nester, Caleb Peters, Katie Wetherbee, Susan Wherley

- Katie offered an opening prayer
- **Ecumenical Lent Series: "RISE UP! The Power of the Beloved Community"**
 - Wednesday evening gatherings with four other churches through Lent:
 - Shiloh Baptist Church
 - Christ Episcopal Church
 - St. Mark's Presbyterian Church
 - First Baptist Church of Greater Cleveland
 - February 25th was hosted at Fairmount - 75 people!
 - Budget coming out of Adult Faith Formation, will be under \$1000 in total
 - March 4th was at St. Mark's - 95 people!
 - They worried about not having sufficient food, as they were only planning for 50, but there was enough at the end
 - March 11th will be at First Baptist
 - No one on FF has heard from members specifically missing Lent bags or booklets
- **Silent Saturday**
 - Saturday **March 28th**, being planned by Kate, Oona, and Lauren
 - Lindsay noted that this event has a great group of lay leadership
 - Community-wide silent retreat, with offerings including yin yoga, guided meditation, sound bath, reading room, craft room, three meals, entry/exit singing circles, and a time for dialogue and reflection at the conclusion of the event
 - Oona and Kate meeting today for planning; Oona shared updates:
 - Aiming for 40 participants
 - Kate working on a sharable Facebook link
 - Kate meeting with a yoga teacher today
 - Craft ideas welcome (Lindsay has many)
 - Volunteers have signed up mainly for ushering, TBD how many still needed but they definitely need help with cleanup at the end
 - Susan will come for cleanup
- **UPCaM (United Protestant Campus Ministries)**
 - Dinner Church was held on **February 8th** at Covenant Presbyterian Church
 - Kate led worship, Caleb was the other attendee from Fairmount
 - No youth were able to join
 - Approximately 20 students attended: great range including master's program students and international students
 - Caleb reflected that it was a welcoming community and a meaningful experience and he looks forward to our hosting future sessions
 - Goal remains for Fairmount to sponsor Dinner Church once per semester: this involves cooking dinner and being present for worship and dinner
 - Next date would be fall semester 2026
 - Discussed that we've had challenging dates thus far (Thanksgiving weekend and Super Bowl Sunday), that we've made the most of these experiences, and that we look forward to continued support of UPCA
- **Women's Retreat**
 - A date has been selected!

- **Saturday May 16th**
 - The retreat will be held at Fairmount
 - Last held May 2024 on Mother's Day weekend with an excellent turnout
 - Prior attendees expressed no clear preference about location, timing, etc. (about half preferred to be off campus and half preferred to stay at Fairmount)
 - Committee (thus far): Lindsay, Kate, Nancy, Oona
 - They are welcoming other committee members who are energized about the event, open to the congregation
 - Ideas: discussing aging in a beautiful uplifting kind of way, possibly a lecture
- **Discovering the Spiritual Wisdom of Trees**
 - Book by Leah Rampy and Beth Norcross
 - William Birkett Williams lecture scheduled for **Wednesday May 13th** by one of the authors (TBD which author)
 - Alycia Ashburn is planning a book study in the 6 weeks leading up to the lecture
 - Participants are asked to attend at least 4 out of 6 weeks
 - Caleb and Nancy volunteered to help lead small groups
 - Alycia and Nikkie Monah are also planning more Spirituality in Nature walks for spring
 - Next Spirituality in Nature walk scheduled for **Sunday March 15th at 3 PM** at Lower Shaker Lake
 - They've had a good turnout every time
- **William Birkett Williams (WBW)**
 - A second spring WBW lecture is scheduled for **Tuesday March 24th**
 - Dr. Peter Koritansky, Director of the Center for Civics, Culture, and Society at Cleveland State University
 - There has been concern expressed by several members of the congregation that Dr. Koritansky's role and values may not align with Fairmount's
 - It was stated that some members of the congregation may be planning to attend the lecture to challenge Dr. Koritansky on these values
 - Oona asked if Dr. Koritansky was aware that this may be a challenging audience; it is not clear if he knows
 - In our bylaws, a member of Faith Formation is supposed to be on the WBW committee, though this has not been the case for several years
 - Current WBW committee: Karin Dakin (chair), Jeff Barnes, and one other person
 - Session is currently discussing governance and restructuring
 - FF agreed to defer assigning someone to WBW until further guidance is provided by Session (hopefully in time for potential fall lecture planning)
 - Historically, we have not publicized these lectures very well and a goal going forward would be to better invite the community to these events
- **Youth Summer Update**
 - Middle Schoolers
 - Plan for middle school youth to attend the Montreat Middle School Conference in Tennessee
 - Maryville College - July 15-19
 - Currently we have 3-4 youth signed up, goal is to get 6 youth
 - Many parents have expressed interest in future trips even if they aren't able to come this year
 - Kate and Lisa will be chaperones, planning for one additional chaperone
 - One goal is helping expose youth to the idea of going to Montreat, NC in the future

- High Schoolers
 - High school youth are planning an Appalachian immersion trip with a church with a service project element based on real-time needs in the community
 - Kentucky - July 27-August 3 (dates work well for most families)
 - Signup was just sent out this week; also aiming for 5-6 kids
 - More affordable for families (and also Fairmount) than prior trips
 - Gordon shared that his brother went on a Fairmount trip to Appalachia and maintained a close relationship with the pastor in subsequent years
 - Frontera de Cristo border immersion trip at the Arizona/Mexico border deferred given parental concerns about safety with current cartel activity and the current US State Department travel advisory
 - Remains a possibility for a future trip
- Katie asked about the possibility of a combined youth trip this year or in the future, with separate experiences and also time to be together (especially if the middle school trip isn't able to proceed)
 - Lindsay shared thought process about the dearth of current middle schoolers and the goal for the large cohort of incoming 6th graders to have an experience together to bond as a group
 - Lisa shared her prior experience with a combined middle/high school group and how it was challenging for all parties
 - Nancy shared about past Fairmount middle school youth trips to local areas, including one to Ashtabula helping local families
 - Lisa also suggested the possibility of inviting youth from other congregations to join with us for future trips
- **Kids Update**
 - Lisa reported that WE Time and Club 4/5 consistently have around 6-10 kids attending
 - Club 4/5 having their own designated pews is going very well
 - She initially designated adults to sit there when she wasn't present, but kids are now self-policing well
 - Lisa's dreams for kids:
 - Small "Prayground" space in the chapel
 - Prayground is a quiet play space within a worship space
 - Carpet designation area with stuffies/quiet toys
 - Ideal to have visibility of what's going on up front (often placed near front)
 - Lindsay suggested bringing this to Session
 - Making church more "neurosparkly" → BELONGING
 - Lisa shared a photo of a wooden cart/display area containing all kinds of sensory support items/tools for kids who would benefit as well as a list of suggested items for purchase (would replace current worship play bags)
 - Idea gleaned from APCE Christian Ed Conference in January
 - Oona raised that items should avoid noise or mess
 - Component of educating the congregation about these needs
 - Many adults would likely benefit too!
 - Katie pointed out that these ideas help people BELONG, part of our mission!
 - **MOTION:** Pursue development of a prayground in the Chapel and a sensory tool station for the sanctuary to better accommodate all members of the church.
 - Proposed by Katie, seconded by Nancy, passed unanimously
 - With this enthusiasm, Lisa will make a concrete plan for presentation to Session
- Gordon offered a closing prayer